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OUR COUNTRY :  
SHAMED, BUT SAVED.

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Our Country:—Shamed but Saved.

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SERMON

ON

THE NATIONAL FAST-DAY,

Sept. 26, 1861.

BY

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PASTOR OF THE PROSPECT HILL REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH, NEW-YORK.

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## SERMON.



JUDGES VI : 13.

“AND GIDEON SAID UNTO HIM, ‘O, MY LORD, IF THE LORD BE WITH US, WHY THEN IS ALL THIS BEFALLEN US? AND WHERE BE ALL HIS MIRACLES WHICH OUR FATHERS TOLD US OF?’”

The Lord led Israel out of Egypt. He brake their bonds and brought them freedom. A land fair and fertile He gave them to dwell in, and fed them with the fatness of the earth. They sat in peace, and none dared to disturb them, for they were His care. For this care He asked fear. The least they could rightly have rendered to the Lord for all His mercies would have been constant service, a true love and thankful devotion. But they did not obey His voice, neither serve Him with a true heart fervently. Their impiety made them weak. It estranged God, and that left them without protection. Then trouble came. Terrible were the disasters that fell upon them. And no help came until, as we do to-day, they cried unto the Lord. Then the Lord, singling out the man for the day, sent an angel to Gideon to summon him to the work of Israel's deliverance. This man heard from heavenly lips the assurance meant to give him hope and courage for the fight, the assurance of God's pres-

ence and help. But hearing, he looked around upon ruined cities, upon recent graves, upon the impoverishment and terror of the nation, and his lips asked: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?"

We may suspect that there was in these inquiries an infusion of doubt, that unbelief, lurking within, questioned as to the fact of the Divine presence in a land so darkly shadowed by troubles, and petulantly called for a repetition of ancient miracles. But perhaps we wrong the honored man who spake these words. His tone may have been not of doubt and petulance, but of grief and penitence, asking, "With God yet among us, the disasters of to-day declare that He must have great cause of controversy with us,—what is that cause? Let us know it, that we may humble ourselves. His miracles for our defense have been many. How ready He has always been to save! What now checks His hand? What holds Him back from working for His own? Let us know, that we may break off that which keeps His favor from us."

The appropriateness of such inquiries in that tone and temper for us to-day, every heart, I am sure, will at once feel and be ready to confess. This is for us, "a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy."

We began this year with prayer and humiliation. Its first week had not passed when, in view of threatening clouds on our horizon, the nation was called to



cry unto the Lord. And now again, before three-fourths of the year has quite passed away, in fasting, humiliation and prayer the nation bows itself down before the face of the Lord God. I do not think that two national fasts have ever before occurred in our land in one year.

The voice that but lately, from the highest place, called the nation to arms, now calls it to prayer,—to pray armed, ready to dare what duty demands, but daring to hope only in God's blessing. It is worth no little sorrow to hear from the ruler's seat the call of a nation to penitence and prayer. It is the public protest of the common conscience against infidelity. God does reign, and the heart knows it, though the proud head may sometimes dare to deny it. Especially is this marked in humiliation for sin. One that counts himself worthy of the mercies he receives may cheaply acknowledge the good given, and with pride give thanks. But penitence for sin gets no relief in its pain from any self-confidence. It seeks the dust. It hides its face. With bitter words of self-accusation it makes confession, if haply the Lord may hear and be gracious.

Very satisfactory and comforting is it to take notice with what unanimity this call to humiliation and prayer has been approved in our land. The deep heart of this people, careless and worldly as we seem on the surface, knows that this is right, and believes that it is wise. Through all the loyal States this hour rises one voice of supplication, and millions mourning

cry unto the Lord. And I verily believe also that in the States involved in the rebellion, many, whose voices the merciless hand of the revolt hath hushed, will with us to-day cry unto the Lord for the dear land, both theirs and ours. They, who cannot amid the tumult of treason make men hear, will make the Lord hear to-day. No violence of man can bar up the way to the Mercy-seat. Welcome, welcome to-day is that help which comes of the faithful among the faithless! God grant they may soon have room to show their loyalty in other ways beside prayer!

A sad sight, truly, is our land now. So lately quiet and prosperous, by a blow as sudden as a lightning-flash it seems now to be severed, and the broken fragments, tossed by angry waves, madly dash against each other as if to the ruin of both. One portion of our land is girt by a circle of arms. From the edge of the distant settlements on our western border down to oozy Cairo, along Kentucky's fair valleys, once known as the "dark and bloody ground," doomed, perhaps, to regain in deadlier battle its ancient name, to the gap by which the Potomac passes the mountain ridge, past the swelling dome of the Capitol, down to the walls of the great fortress that frowns upon the sea, stretches a line of camps and entrenchments and bristling armies. And from the point where that line touches the ocean, great ships watch every port and inlet round by the flowery shores beyond the place where Mississippi's turbid current mingles with the sea. As under the ancient law the leper was put in a several house, that the hideous

disease upon him might not spread, so here the strong police of the nation hath shut in treason, that as little harm as possible may come to the people from this horrible pest, until the fit hour come for its eradication, if God so please. It is when we look upon this sad sight, many of the worst features of which have not been portrayed, that we ought to be ready to say: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" And though I count this rather a day for prayer than preaching, yet it may not be amiss to offer as guidance in prayer, some answers to this query.

1. In a course of years, and those but few, since the establishment of our government, a good Providence over us had given us vast accessions of population, of territory, and of wealth. But we did not humbly receive these gifts. We did not piously ask what use we ought to make of our mercies. Rather we grew to them. We lived in them. We made our country our God. We glorified it. We magnified it. We adored it. We sang hymns in its praise. We forgot that all men are as nothing to Him to whom all this glory was due. Sure we made ourselves, in this uncertain world, of rapid and uninterrupted advance. In the sea of our bold sailing we could see no shoals, no rocks; and every storm we defied. The mightiest blast should, as a servant to our skill, but impel us on our way; and even the lightnings of heaven, caught by our craft, should, harmless, turn the wheels of our strength, and minister to our success. Nothing was too extravagant to believe about ourselves and our destiny.

Other nations have found us bold, braggart and insolent. We have not waited until, with consolidated power, we could calmly take our seat in the grand council of the peoples, but like an upstart who fears that his claim will be questioned, we have rudely jostled aside our elders, and forced our way into the circle, quick to quarrel if any queried as to the right or decency of our doings. A restless and encroaching ambition has made our neighbors watch us suspiciously; and our braggart tongue has not served to lull their suspicions. We have demanded that the world confess the success of Democracy, and that, having waited through the slow ages for wisdom, it has now seen it in the mighty Republic of the West.

This, our pride and self-confidence, has made us vulnerable. We have deserved rebuke, and rebuke has come. It has taken the form most mortifying, and the taste most bitter. Had an outside enemy, envious of our peace, and a foe to our freedom, assailed and overwhelmed us, we still could have held up our heads among men, our honor safe. But now that the stability of our government has been threatened by our own citizens, our shame that the attempt has been made can scarce be increased even by the success of that attempt.

The hilt of the sword, that we brandished in the face of the world, hath proved sharper than the point, and hath cut to the bone the hand that held it. The tree of our glory, to the shade and rest of whose spreading boughs, with a boasting hospitality, we in-

vited all men, hath shed down madness and death on our own heads. The circle of our strength, in which we trusted as if it had been a wall of adamant, has turned out to be the coil of a serpent, and its force threatens to close upon us to our ruin.

Thus God has made our pride to humble us. Thus our very strength is made to tear and mangle us. The Lord hath put us to shame, and made our shame to be seen of all the earth. Let us then humble ourselves and repent.

2. Before this trouble dashed like an armed man upon us, worldliness was eating out the heart of our nation. To live delicately, to gather under our plain institutions all the vanities of courtly circles,—that seemed to have assumed the dimensions of almost a national ambition. We were ruining our young men and our young women. We were rearing up a generation to serve the world only. The stern, serious life of the past seemed to be already only a matter of history. The air was growing too thin and poor for strong lungs to breathe. Soft ease had lulled us into a luxurious sleep so still and deep that a shock, less terrible than the present, could not have awakened us. But now a great change has come, for our good God has given us something serious to think of, something stern to do, something heavy to bear. He has turned the tide of the nation's thoughts. He has summoned her strength to do battle for his ancient gifts, and the venerable principles of our Government. To check the growth of luxurious habits and the cur-

rent of folly, He has stopped the flow of riches, and scattered the hoards of the wealthy. In places where heartless fashion lavished its millions upon follies, but where it was hard to support a mission or to build a church, the Lord has recalled the silver and gold, the streets mourn, the empty warehouses echo the laments of their owners, and ships rot at the wharves. Is it not well?

“ Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth increases, but where men decay.”

Gladly may we give up our material prosperity, if God thereby make us truer, stronger, and wiser for Himself.

3. Before this day of disaster we wore the bonds of our loyalty lightly. By some selfish and mean contrivance the yoke of our patriotism was held up from our shoulders. To the most of those who gave any attention to politics, party was more than country. We have let men, who had no motive but their own power or pelf, rule. We have taken partisan cries from their lips, and striven for the domination of our favorites. All this while great national interests have been neglected.

High, sacred, and holy are the duties of citizens. We did not know it, or if we did know it, we did not care for it. We had stagnated. Corruption had gathered in the black and noisome pool of our politics. There was no motion but that of crawling and slimy reptiles, bred of that corruption. It was neces-



sary to let on a stream of purity from a higher source. It has come. It is a flood. We stagger in its rush. But it will, if God pleases, sweep out the mud and slime, and leave a pure stream, in which a world may wash and be clean.

4. God has some great ends to gain by this convulsion,—ends that rise high above the purposes of men. Indications of this we cannot fail to see in the sweep and force of these events. The whole course of this revolt, from the first, fast spread itself beyond the lines which men drew, and quickly shook itself free from the control of men. In the South the leaders never thought of resistance such as they have met. Nor did the people think that they were to follow their leaders thus far. At the North we most unwillingly opened our eyes to the magnitude of the crisis, and only by the most violent shocks were roused to make it a serious matter. We jested and laughed. We knowingly predicted. We could see, not far away, the speedy discomfiture, nay, rather the spontaneous subsiding of the revolt. When the contest began we boasted ourselves, when girding on our harness, as he that putteth it off. We marked out for our army times, and seasons, and lines of victory. But panics have spoiled our plans, and the work grows in spite of us, because God's ends, and not ours, are to be gained by it. What those Divine purposes are how can we know? There is in this matter only one true and safe philosophy. One man guesses, and another man guesses. Our writers, our orators, and our preachers, too, flood us with their vain predictions.

One can tell us what this struggle will do for other lands. Another knows how it will affect our own country. One comes to teach us how this strife will leave the white man. Another has clear vision of how it will end for the slave. But what it will be, God only knows. He will do all His will. Let us be content to do calmly and earnestly all our duty. God will care for the end. It is safer with Him than with us.

Our nation wants yet some element of strength, or wisdom, or patience, or humility, or righteousness, in order to do well its work. Some one of its limbs is palsied, and only some surgery, like that whose cutting sharpness has made us cry to-day unto the Lord, will let into it the flow of true life. Some excrescence mars with hideous growth its beauty, or cramps the free movements of its strength, and must be torn out, even if its roots be laced about the heart. Therefore God has let the ambitious aspirings of men, the avaricious and cruel hopes of men, the imbecility and treachery of men, the coldness and apathy of men, to entangle us in this net. When His work is done He will give us deliverance, and in the joy of that deliverance we will give Him the praise of service, such as we could never have rendered had it not been for what we suffer. At the siege of Sebastopol it is said that a cannon ball shattered a rock, and that water gushed forth, of which the weary drank for many days. So shall this shock of our day open fountains of good that shall refresh, with God's blessing, our whole land for many days. And then shall we know,



and gladly tell each other, why, seeing that the Lord is with us, all this is befallen us. The mystery of our misery shall be made clear by the measure of God's mercy.

With this hope we may be impelled to ask with Gideon: "If the Lord be with us, where be all His miracles, which our fathers told us of?"

The history of our nation has been a history of Divine interpositions. We will not now despair because our sins and the necessities of our discipline and growth have brought upon us some disasters. We wait for miracles of God like those of which our fathers have told us,—like them, yea, and much more abundant and glorious. Let us wait for them in prayer, service and hope.

Let us wait in prayer. "If," said the Lord to His ancient people, "I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts that they devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;"—and has not this civil strife all these evils combined, for does it not, as when the rain refuses to fall, dry up the land, and diminish its production,—does it not, like the locusts, take the bread out of the people's mouth,—and does it not, like the pestilence, send sorrow into many homes?—"Then," says the Lord, "if my people that are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." The Lord's

ear is not heavy. He is to be trusted now as ever. Let us cry unto Him, and He will hear, and heal our land.

But to prayer we must add service. Let each acquaint himself with the history and principles of that Government which this formidable conspiracy, destructive to freedom and the hopes of men, not only here, but in all the world, seeks to demolish, so as to be able with words strong with truth, to rebuke every one that would apologize for rebellion, or extenuate its crimes. That is service worth rendering, and in many instances as much needed as bullets for the battle.

Learn to lay by all party prejudices and preferences, and to judge of men and measures on broad principles, and in behalf of our country, and our whole country.

Bear taxation bravely, and all the burdens of the day firmly.

Give way to all honest feeling that bemoans the loss of life, the distress of families robbed of their dearest, the struggles of poverty increased, and the strife of brothers, but make that feeling always the servant of sound reason. Let it learn to lay the blame of disturbance upon those that make it, not on those that quell it, and to charge the cost of the restoration of peace to those that broke the peace. And let not feeling indulge in wishes for any peace, but a true peace and a strong peace.

Look at a noble scriptural example. We see David, Israel's honored ruler, going out of Jerusalem, weeping as he went. What means it? A rebellion, long devised and secretly arranged, like that which troubles us, had broken out. Its first movements, (and here is the likeness again,) were successful, and threatened the capital. David wept, for this revolt was led by a darling son, and moved with such vigor, and such seeming popular approval in certain portions of the land, (there is the likeness once more,) that he had painful fears as to the issue, as many here have had. But with this pressure on his heart, and this gripe of rebel force upon his hand, did he determine to let rebellion alone, and give it its way? No! He was opposed to peace, except when gained by righteousness. He wept, but he warred also. He wept as we weep to-day, and yet he girded himself for the fight. And God gave peace by means of war, to him and to the land. And the people everywhere, even in the section in which the unnatural and causeless revolt had broken out, strove with one another to show their loyalty, and their joy at the suppression of treason. So do we, trustful, wait to see it in our own land.

We are sorry for our sin, and troubled by the just judgments of God, but we do not meanly cringe before the baseness of rebellion, and like cowards yield to the foes of our land. We bow to God, but never to rebels. We hide our faces before the Lord, but we look treachery in the face. With our confession of sin to God, we speak out to man a solemn, serious,

dutiful condemnation and defiance of apostacy. We will not permit any one to snatch from us, and vilely cast away that inheritance which has cost the tears and blood of the best men of our best age, and which God hath trusted to our care for our children. It is a sacred deposit in our hands, and we must keep it safe for other generations, and for the world. With such views we can be as composed in war as in peace, as great in victory as in conflict, as resolute under disaster as in prosperity.

Trust in the Lord then, and hold fast to hope. No interest of righteousness shall in the end get damage from these disasters of our day. God will give the kingdom to his Son. The Prince of Peace shall reign. Even war shall make way for His coming. Then shall all these troubles cease. That shall cure all the diseases of this sick earth. That shall be the refuge from all the enemies of this beleaguered world. Then shall the earth have rest. God hasten it, and He shall have the praise! Amen!



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